An Examination of an Eschatological Christian Leader: Last Emperor Topos in Oracula Attributed to Byzantine Emperor Leo VI (886-912)

Hıristiyan Bir Eskatolojik Lider İncelemesi: Bizans İmparatoru VI. Leon'a (886-912) Atfedilen Oracula'da Son İmparator Toposu

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Özet

Hıristiyan eskatolojisinde liderlik tipolojisi yalnızca Mesih figürüyle sınırlı değildir. Bu tipoloji, özellikle Son İmparator gibi figürlerle genişletilmiştir. Bizans İmparatoru VI. Leon'a (886-912) atfedilen *Oracula* metni, bu imparatoru, kutsal soya sahip, ilahi olarak seçilmiş bir lider olarak sunar ve hem İncil hem de imparatorluk arketiplerinden yararlanır. Onun kutsal soy ağacı ve düzeni yeniden tesis etme rolü vurgulanarak, imparatorluk gücü ile ilahi irade arasındaki bağ güçlendirilir. Bu makale, son imparatorun soyu, fiziksel özellikleri ve yeryüzüne inişiyle ilgili kehanet detaylarına odaklanmaktadır. Çalışma, bu mitin Bizans politik teolojisine hizmet etmek üzere, özellikle kriz dönemlerinde, imparatorluk otoritesini sabitlemek ve meşrulaştırmak amacıyla oluşturulduğunu öne sürmektedir. Bu mit, Bizans toplumunun dini ve politik hassasiyetleriyle uyumlu eskatolojik temalar aracılığıyla güç kazanmıştır. Makale, söz konusu mit kurgusunun, Bizans toplumunun dini ve siyasi hassasiyetleriyle uyumlu eskatolojik temaları kullanarak imparatorluk gücünü stabilize etme ve meşrulaştırma amacı taşıdığını sonucuna varmaktadır. Böylece Hıristiyan eskatolojisinin önemli karakterlerinden birine dair alt metin okuması metoduyla detaylı bir çözümlemeye girişilmiş, literatürdeki önemli boşluklardan biri de doldurulmaya çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hıristiyan eskatolojisi, kehanet, politik teoloji, Oracula, VI Leon.

Abstract

In Christian eschatology, the leadership typology is not limited solely to the figure of the Messiah. This typology has been expanded, particularly with figures such as the Last Emperor. *Oracula*, attributed to Byzantine Emperor Leo VI (886-912), presents this emperor as a divinely chosen leader, drawing from Biblical and imperial archetypes. His sacred lineage and role in restoring order are emphasized, reinforcing the connection between imperial power and divine will. This article focuses on the prophesied details regarding the last emperor's genealogy, physical characteristics, and descent to earth. The study argues that this myth was constructed to serve Byzantine political theology during times of crisis, stabilizing and legitimizing imperial authority through eschatological themes that resonated with the religious and political concerns of Byzantine society. Thus, a detailed analysis of one of the key figures in Christian eschatology has been undertaken through the method of close reading, aiming to fill one of the significant gaps in the literature.

Keywords: Christian eschatology, prophecy, political theology, Oracula, Leo VI.

Introduction

In Byzantine literature, the genre of oracula encompasses works that convey prophetic declarations or foretell future events. The oracular works produced by the Byzantine intelligentsia are predominantly characterized by the wish-prophecies and are enriched with eschatological elements, constructing a detailed apocalyptic narrative. Within this framework, Byzantium is portrayed as the guardian of all Christians, irrespective of Christological distinctions, providing protection against entities considered faithless until the Second Coming of Christ. The narrative structure of works within this genre unfolds within the framework of a prophetic scenario. Initially, Christians are subjected to various forms of punishment as retribution for their sins. These punishments are typically depicted as being inflicted by a non-Christian people or state that oppresses them. Following this period of suffering, a Byzantine emperor of sacred genealogy delivers the Christian population from oppression and unites them under a single banner, ushering in a prolonged era of prosperity. Shortly thereafter, the Anti-christ emerges on earth, and within the narrative, the final emperor is exalted to heaven while the Messiah is sent to earth for the ultimate battle. At this juncture, a confrontation between the Messiah and the Antichrist ensues, culminating in the Messiah's victory. Following approximately a millennium of Messianic rule, the Day of Judgment arrives.[1]

The works belonging to this genre are composed either through an intuitive method, where the author claims to receive future-oriented messages from certain divine entities, or a technical method, involving the examination of objects or living beings through practices such as astrology, ornithomancy, lecanomancy, or ichthyomancy; or through a method referred to as oracles of supplication, which offer prophecies concerning a particular individual or state.[2] The oracle attributed to Emperor Leo VI of the Macedonian dynasty, which forms the core focus of this study, is composed utilizing the method of wish-prophecy and exemplifies the most sophisticated instance of this genre within Byzantine literature. At this point, it would be appropriate to provide information regarding the technique and content of the text in question.

The only surviving copy of *Oracula* is preserved at the University of Amsterdam Library, cataloged under the Amstelodamensis Graecus manuscript with the number 70. MS. VI E 8. This manuscript was acquired by the Dutch classicist G. Dousa during his visit to Istanbul in 1597. It was subsequently published by the Dousa family in 1598 under the title *Του σοφωτάτου βασιλέως Λέοντος χρησμός* (The Oracles of the Wisest Emperor Leo).[3] The published work under this title

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[1]   For the narrative structure see Paul Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Literature* (CA: UCP, 1985), 1-9; Bernard McGinn, "Introduction", *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 28-36.

[2]   For these methods, see Gary Knoppers, "Democratizing Revelation? Prophets, Seers and Visionaries in Chronicles", *Prophecy and Prophets in Ancient Israel*, ed. John Day (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 391-409; Ron Hendel, "Away from Ritual: The Prophetic Critique", *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion: Essays in Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. S. M. Olyan (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 79; Martti Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy: Near Eastern, Biblical and Greek Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 20-21; Paul Alexander, "Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources", *American Historical Review*, 73/4 (1967): 997-1018.

[3]   The aforementioned work has been published in two facsimile editions, the first in Athens in 1955 and the second in Ghent in 1986. See *Του σοφωτάτου βασιλέως Λέοντος χρησμός*, ed. Katerina Kyriakou (Athens: Σύλλογος πρὸς

includes fifteen distinct prophecies and narratives, as well as an appendix. Additionally, this manuscript is highly renowned for its illustrations. The scribes who copied the manuscript created a drawing for each prophecy, aiming to visually depict the content of the prophecies. The manuscript was first published in 1655 by the German historian and librarian P. Lambeck (d. 1680) under the title *Ἀνωνύμου παράφρασις των του βασιλέως Λέοντος Χρησμών* (Anonymous Paraphrases of the Oracles of Emperor Leon).[4] P. Migne published this work in 1863 in volume 107 of the Patrologia Graeca under the title *Oracula: cum Figuris et Antiqua Graeca Paraphrasi*, including translations into both Greek and Latin.[5] In the 20th century, the increasing scholarly focus on prophetic traditions led to a heightened interest in the work attributed to Leon VI. In 2002, a committee from the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Amsterdam, led by W. Brokkaar, prepared an edition of this work and provided a partial English translation.[6] In the prepared edition, the sixteen texts are divided into two groups. The first group consists of fifteen poems written in both short and long meter, while the second group comprises two lengthy poems that address the main sequence of prophecies.

Brokkaar's detailed study examined potential interpolations in the text. As with all texts, interpolation poses a potential issue in apocalyptic literature. Given that various instruments employed in apocalyptic tradition vary according to contemporary conditions and hopes, there is a high likelihood that such texts are particularly susceptible to alterations. This is indeed the case with *Oracula*. However, it is also possible to view this text as a compilation. Although the text clearly constitutes a compilation of multiple apocalyptic works, the fact that it specifically references the fall of Constantinople in 1204 and lacks any oracle regarding the recapture of the city in 1261 suggests that the compiler(s) likely lived during the Nicaean Empire period.[7] Following the information pertaining to *Oracula*, this article will first provide a general assessment of the last emperor topos and then focus on the character of the last emperor in *Oracula*.

1. The Last Emperor Topos in Byzantine Prophetic Literature

To thoroughly comprehend the topos of the last emperor in Byzantine prophetic/apocalyptic literature, it is essential first to explore the origins of this concept. P. Alexander posits that this topos partially derives from Jewish messianic traditions. He contends that the fundamental attributes of this figure bear considerable resemblance to the Messiah anticipated by the Jews rather than the specific details. Both the Jewish and Byzantine figures share commonalities: their names and identities are unspecified; they are expected to emerge during periods of significant

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Διάδοσιν Ὠφελίμων Βιβλίων, 1955); *Τοῦ σοφωτάτου βασιλέως Λέοντος χρησμός,* ed. Jeannine Vereecken (Gent: OGL, 1986).

4   Peter Lambeck, *Georgii Codini et alterius cuiusdam anonymi excerpta de antiquitatibus Constantinopolitanis* (Venetiis: Javarina,1729), 155-188.

5   *PG* 107, ed. Paul Migne (Paris: Fratres, 1863), 1122-1167.

6   In this article, unless otherwise stated, this edition of *Oracula* was used. See Walter Brokkaar et al. (ed.), *The Oracles of the Most Wise Emperor Leo VI & The Tale of the True Emperor* (Amsterdam: UvA, 2022). The relevant work will be cited as *Oracula* in the footnotes throughout the rest of the article.

7   See Brokkaar, *Oracle*, 31-32.

national tribulation; their associated locations, such as Jerusalem and/or Konstantinoupolis, are variously sanctified; and they are envisioned to rule over a temporary dominion on earth. Alexander further asserts that while this messianic concept among the Jews originated from the general characteristics of Old Testament prophets, its literary formulation was shaped by the challenging periods experienced under Seleucid and Roman dominion. [8]

G. Reinink, in his work *Die Religion des Judentums im spät-hellenistischen Zeitalter*, opposes Alexander's view, identifying the origin of the last emperor in the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, a key representative of the prophetic/apocalyptic genre, thought to have been composed in Syriac in the 7th century. Reinink argues that the figure of the last emperor is clearly defined in this text and reflects distinct elements of Syriac culture. He suggests that the reason the last emperor's name is unknown is not due to Jewish Messianic tradition but rather to the New Testament verse, "Therefore, you also must be ready, for the **Son of Man** is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matta 24:44).[9] Additionally, Reinink believes that the descriptions of the last emperor's role were influenced by the Syriac work *Cave of Treasures* (ܡܥܪܬ ܓܙܐ).[10] The central emphasis in Reinink's antithesis is that the temporary empire ruled by the last emperor is not the Messianic kingdom of God but rather a period in which the existing Christian empire will experience unparalleled strength and invincibility. [11]

H. Suermann, in *Der byzantinische Endkaiser bei Pseudo-Methodius*, takes a more reconciliatory approach, arguing that both Alexander and Reinink's theses are valid. However, rather than viewing them as opposing arguments, Suermann suggests that the last emperor topos draws from both cultures and was fully developed within Byzantine apocalyptic literature.[12] This article adopts Suermann's perspective, which argues that it is entirely plausible that Christian apocalyptic writers borrowed themes and narratives from Jewish Messianic traditions, as Alexander claims, and adapted them for their own apocalyptic works. Therefore, it would be incorrect to claim that Jewish Messianic culture could not have influenced this literature simply because of its Jewish origins. At the same time, Reinink's arguments are also valid. From the 8th century onwards, Syriac apocalyptic literature engaged in significant exchanges with Byzantine

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[8]   Paul Alexander, "The Medieval Legend of the Last Emperor and Its Messianic Origin", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes,* 41 (1978), 1-15; Paul Alexander*, The Byzantine Apocalyptic*, 174-184; See also. Wilhelm Bousset - Hugo Gressmann, *Die Religion des Judentums in Späthellenistischen Zeitalter* (Tubingen: JCB Mohr, 1926), 202-204.

[9]   Gerrit J. Reinink, "Die Religion des Judentums in Spdthellenistischen Zeitalt", *Non Nova, Sed Nove: Mélanges de civilisation médiévale dédiés a W. Noomen*, ed. Martin Gosman - Jaap van Os (Groningen: Bouma's Boekhius, 1984), 195-209; Gerrit J. Reinink, "*Alexandre et le dernier* empereur du monde: les développements du con- cept *de la* royauté chrétienne *dans les* sources syriaques du septième siècle", *Alexandre le Grand dans les littératures occidentales et proche-orientales: actes du Colloque de Paris*, ed. Laurence Harf et al. (Paris: Nanterre, 1999), 149-159.

[10]   Reinink, "*Judentums*", 203. See also ܡܥܪܬ ܓܙܐ*(Cave of Treasures),* ed. Ernst. A. W. Budge (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1927).

[11]   Reinink, "*Judentums*", 200-201.

[12]   Harald Suermann, "Der byzantinische Endkaiser bei Pseudo-Methodius", *Oriens Christianus,* 71 (1987): 140-155.

prophetic/apocalyptic writings, and by later centuries, these exchanges had become so extensive that the two apocalyptic traditions were regarded as continuations of one another.[13]

In addition to the debate on the sources of the last emperor narrative, it is essential to examine the extent to which this topos was influenced by Byzantium. Two key concepts that must be addressed in this context are *parousia* (παρουσία) and *katechon* (κατέχων). *Parousia*, meaning "arrival" or "presence," emphasizes the glorious return of Christ and the preparation for this event.[14] In Christian terminology, this concept is found in the Gospels in passages that address the return of Christ.[15] Defined in the early stages of Christianity, this term held significant interpretative authority across diverse Christian communities despite differences in culture, geography, and social memory. In Byzantine Christianity, *parousia* was given special importance, envisioned as occurring suddenly, like a flash of lightning, at a moment known to no one.[16] According to interpretations developed from this theory, emperors —particularly Iustinianos (527-565) and Herakleios (610-641)— believed they played a vital role in the establishment of God's Kingdom at Christ's return, and preparing for this event was seen as their solemn responsibility.[17] At this point, the narrative of *parousia* becomes a concept that supports the last emperor topos, as the last emperor is expected to be the precursor to the *parousia* and, when it occurs, will stand alongside Christ with his army of believers. [18]

Another term, katechon, is a concept directly related to Christian political philosophy and finds its place in apocalyptic literature. This concept is explained through the character of the "lawless one" in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians, 2:8). According to this view, Christians should not expect the imminent coming of Christ because, before his arrival, the Anti-christ will appear on Earth. Thus, the katechon defines the arrival of the Anti-christ, which will occur before the parousia. C. Schmitt has argued that this concept is extremely useful for Roman-Byzantine Christianity and is one of the most fitting "restrainers" in Orthodox ethics. [19] Indeed, for Byzantines who have believed in the end of the world since the 6th century, the katechon has been a concept approached with continuous caution. That is because to avoid becoming a follower of the forthcoming Antichrist, possessing a strong faith is considered the most crucial condition.

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[13] For similar cultural elements between Jewish, Syriac, and Byzantine apocalyptic texts, see *Apocalypticism and Eschatology in Late Antiquity: Encounters in the Abrahamic Religions, 6th-8th Century*, ed. Hagit Amirav et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2017); James Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[14] Frank Cross & Elizabeth Livingstone, "Parousia", *Oxford Dictionary of Christian Church* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 1223.

[15] See *New Testament* (accessed on 10.06.2023), Matthew 24:3; Mark 8:31-38; Luke 12:38; John 2:28.

[16] Mario Inzulza, *The Parousia: A Suitable Symbol for a Renewed Eschatological, Cosmic Narrative* (Boston: Boston College, School of Theology and Ministry, 2018), 108-109.

[17] Wolfram Brandes, "Byzantine Predictions of the End of the World 500, 1000 and 1492 AD", *The End(s) of Time(s): Apocalypticism, Messianism and Utopianism Through the Ages,* ed. Hans Lehner (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 32-63.

[18] Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 44, Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 32-33, Stephen Shoemaker, "The Reign of God Has Come: Eschatology and Empire in Late Antiquity and Early Islam", *Arabica,* 61/5 (2014): 514-558.

[19] Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum* (New York: Telos Press 1950), 59–60.

Ultimately, the origins of the last emperor narrative can be traced through three sources: those focused on Jewish-Messianic and Old Testament traditions, those centered on Syriac Apocalyptic traditions and the New Testament, and those grounded in the Byzantine cultural context. Although these sources present varying theories, they collectively form an integrated whole, contributing to apocalyptic literature and oracular texts. Therefore, the characteristic elements and representations of the last emperor topos should be analyzed considering the data found in *Oracula* attributed to Emperor Leo VI, as discussed in the introduction.

2. The Last Emperor Topos in Oracula

The prophecies titled *Monarchy* (3) and *Appointment* (16) in *Oracula* attributed to Emperor Leo VI are wish prophecies that provide details about the genealogy, physical characteristics, and earthly appearance of the last emperor. In this section of the paper, these details will be examined through close readings and allegorical analyses.

2.1. On The Genealogy of the Last Emperor

One of the most crucial aspects regarding the last emperor in Oracula is his genealogy. In Byzantine literature, when constructing a genealogy for an emperor, it was customary to establish connections with prominent historical figures or sacred characters from the Old Testament. This practice aimed to highlight the emperor's noble lineage, affirming his right to the throne and suggesting that he would achieve significant successes akin to his illustrious ancestors. Therefore, it is unlikely that the genealogy of the last emperor, who is assigned the task of protecting Christians until the second coming of Christ, would be constructed with merely simplistic connections.

In the third prophecy of *Oracula* titled Monarchy, there is a reference to this constructed genealogy:

> *How extremely bold and swift you are;*
> *and ready for combat, descendant of Byza[20]*

In this excerpt, where the author(s) extol the virtues of the last emperor, the emperor's lineage is linked to Byzas, the legendary *ktistes* (founder) of the city of Byzantion, the precursor of Byzantine Konstantinoupolis. In the myths about Byzas, he is often depicted as a demi-god, the son of the water nymph Semestre, or the grandson of Zeus.[21] However, these depictions are not particularly emphasized by the author(s) of *Oracula*, which is framed by Christian theories of salvation. Instead, a common connection frequently encountered in apocalyptic literature may explain the relationship between the last emperor and Byzas. This connection likely stems from a sacred genealogy, which includes Byzas and appears in nearly every apocalyptic text. According to this genealogy, the lineage of the last emperor begins with Alexander III. the Great (336–323

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[20]   *Oracula*, 3:1-2.
[21]   See *FGrHist* 390, Fr. 3-9 and 5; *Diod.* 4.49-1. See also Thomas Russel, "Before Constantinople", *The Cambridge Companion of Constantinople*, ed. Sarah Bassett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 17-32.

BC). This genealogical construct first appears in the Pseudo-Methodius Apocalyptic Text. In this text, a prominent example of this tradition, Alexander is depicted as a proto-Christian leader who almost established the ideal Christian state. According to this text, Alexander was sent by God to prepare for the first coming of Christ, and his "conquests" are regarded as victories of the Christian Greco-Roman State.[22] In this context, Alexander, regarded as the first ruler of the Greco-Roman State, is depicted as a typological precursor to the last emperor. Thus, the lineage of the last emperor finds its foundation in a heroic proto-Christian leader, and these strong genealogical ties are framed as legitimizing the accomplishments of the last emperor.

However, Alexander's role in apocalyptic texts extends beyond the portrayal of a powerful hero. Through him, these texts establish various connections to Old Testament narratives, where the genealogical design is shaped not only by the depiction of a heroic leader but also through a sacred bond. The Pseudo-Methodius Apocalyptic Text traces Alexander's lineage back to the Kingdom of Kush, which was established in the region encompassing present-day southern Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan after the dissolution of the New Kingdom in the last quarter of the 8th century BCE and remained politically influential until the 4th century CE.[23] According to the narrative, during his campaigns in Egypt, King Philippos II (382–336 BCE) married a princess from the Kushite dynasty, and from this marriage, Alexander the Great was born.[24] The reasons behind this Kushite genealogical design in Byzantine apocalyptic literature remain a topic of significant debate. According to F. J. Martinez and I. Shahid, the intellectuals who composed the Pseudo-Methodius Apocalyptic Text were influenced by the Ethiopian epic *Kebra Nagast*, which dates to the 6th century and was later translated into various languages.[25] The epic centers on the Judaization of the Kushites and their connections to Jewish kings and prophets. According to its plot, the first Kushite king, Menelik I (?-957? BCE), is descended from the prophet Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, Makeda.[26] In this way, a connection between Alexander's lineage and the prophet Solomon is also established. Due to the missionary activities in the region, access to this text would have been relatively easy for the anonymous author(s) of Pseudo-Methodius. By structuring the last emperor's genealogy in this way, they linked this figure to both the heroic and

[22]   Benjamin Garstad (ed.), *Apocalypse Pseudo-Methodius and An Alexandrian World Chronicle* (London: Harvard University Press, 2012), xiii; Anthony Kaldellis, "Alexander the Great in the Byzantine Tradition", *A History of Alexander the Great in World Culture*, ed. Richard Stoneman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 216-241; Yuri Stoyanov, "Apocalypticizing Warfare: From Political Theology to Imperial Eschatology in Seventh to Early Eighth Century Byzantium", *The Armenian Apocalyptic Tradition. A Comperative Perspective,* ed. Sergio La Porta & Kevork Bardakjian (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 379-433;

[23]   For the religious structure of the Kushite Kingdom and its relations with the Byzantine Empire, see Laszlo Török, "The Kindgom of Kush: Handbook of the Napatan-Meroitic Civlisation", *Handbook of Oriental Studies I,* ed. Laszlo Török (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 144; Stanley. M. Burstein, "When Greek was an African Language: The Role of Greek Culture in Ancient and Medieval Nubia, *Journal of World History,* 19/1 (2008): 41-61; Tomas Hagg, "Titles and Honorific Epithets in Nubian Greek Texts", *Norwegian Journal of Greek and Latin Studies,* 65 (1990): 147-177.

[24]   See fn. 21.

[25]   Francesco J. Martinez, "The King of Rūm and the King of Ethiopia in Medieval Apocalyptic Texts from Egypt", *Coptic Studies: Acts of the Third International Congress of Coptic Studies*, ed. Wlodzmierz Godlevski (Warsaw: Editions Scientifiques de Pologne, 1990), 249-257; Irfan Shahid, "The Kebra Nagast in the Light of Recent Research", *Le Museon,* 89 (1976): 133-178.

[26]   See Ernest A. W. Budge (ed.), *Kebra Nagast* (London: Medici Society, 1922), 40-47; Willie F. Page - Hunt Davis (ed.), *Encyclopedia of African History and Culture II*, "Solomonic Dynasty" (London: FOF, 2005), 206.

powerful leader Alexander and the prophet Solomon, a figure of paramount importance in theocentric historiography. In Byzantine apocalyptic literature, however, this genealogy, founded on Solomon and Alexander, is often depicted as extending to Byzas or Konstantinos I (306-337) through either Philippos II. or Alexander III.'s lineage. Thus, not only the last emperor but also some emperors who sat on the Byzantine throne are portrayed as branches of this sacred genealogy.

Ultimately, although the author(s) of *Oracula* only mention the name Byzas regarding the last emperor's genealogy, behind this name lies a narrative that has persisted with significant continuity within the Syriac-Byzantine apocalyptic literature since the 7th century. It is more likely that the author(s) chose Byzas not because he was a demi-god or a powerful founding leader, but due to the genealogical construction in the literature, which is rooted in the Old Testament and adorned with heroic leaders.

2.2. On the Physical Attributes of the Last Emperor

Particularly in Byzantine apocalyptic texts, a detailed physiognomy of the last emperor is presented to captivate the attention of their audience—primarily residents of Konstantinoupolis who followed the ceremonies in which emperors participated (or, in other words, were continuously exposed to a typology of leadership)—and to render this typology more realistic. This detailed depiction describes the leader who will guide the Christians to the eschatological end through various messianic comparisons. In *Oracula*, this character is described with the following features:

> *His identifying marks are as follows: the nail of the big toe of his right foot shows a knob, his conversation is pleasant. His face is well-shaped, and his appearance is feminine. He is middle-aged, bald on the crown and slightly grey-haired. He is very learned and erudite. He foresees the future sharing in [the gift of] prophecy in which he lets other people share. He has an aquiline nose and protuberant eyes. He is poor, shaven and dressed in rags, because he is of no use. His right hand [has] two joints. He bears cords and purple crosses on his two shoulder blades. Natural […] on his chest and neck, and cords on his sides, his throat, his thighs and his arms.* [27]
> *These things will be evident from the mark on the nail of his right foot and from his right eye, which is the squint-eyed eye of fornication. He is holy in the sight of the Lord. He has birthmarks on the right side [of his body], under his chest, and even more on his shoulder. His thigh and his ear, and on his right eyebrow, because of the extent of his mercy. He is lovely with blushing cheeks, and tall. His beard, his moustache and [the hair on] his head are streaked. He is kind, honey-sweet, black-haired with a high forehead.* [28]

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[27]   *Oracula*, 16: 25-30.
[28]   *Oracula*, 16: 68-80.

The physical traits attributed to the last emperor in the aforementioned passage are listed as elements of praise, thus sanctifying his physiognomy. All these traits correspond to the definition of a wise man in the dominant culture of the Byzantine Empire, which is precisely the impression the author seeks to create in the reader. For example, the fact that the emperor is bald symbolizes intelligence and wisdom in the collective consciousness of the Byzantine aristocracy. With the rising interest in antiquity during the middle Byzantine period, the baldness of some famous Greek philosophers' statues became something to be admired by the Byzantine aristocracy. [29] Additionally, the details of the right toenail and right eye in the second paragraph of the excerpt are not mentioned randomly but refer to a subtext rooted in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, the right side of the human body is imbued with holiness, while the left side is assigned a negative connotation: "A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left" (Ecclesiastes, 10:2). This is precisely why the author of *Oracula* describes the characteristic features of the last emperor by pointing to the sanctity of the right side of the body. The other traits are depicted with the physiognomy of a powerful emperor in mind. [30] In order to impress the reader, the physical characteristics of the last emperor must align with the physiognomy in the minds of the people of Konstantinoupolis, who frequently encountered the emperor during various ceremonies, and must even surpass it in power.

2.3. On the Emergence of the Last Emperor

Each of the Byzantine apocalyptic texts offers different yet similar data and plotlines regarding the emergence of the last emperor. However, the most detailed information is found in *Oracula* attributed to Emperor Leo. The author(s) provide precursor or herald elements related to the appearance of this character on Earth. The first of these elements concerns the perception of the last emperor as "dead and useless," a description that clearly contains an underlying *imitatio Christi*:

> *He observes piety and prophecy. People considered him to be nothing and useful for nothing. The Lord will place his hand on his head and will anoint him with oil at the end of time.* [31]

The notion that the person destined to become emperor is perceived as utterly useless is a common symbolic element found in many Byzantine apocalyptic texts. In this context, the last emperor assumes a Christ-like typology. Just as Christ was viewed as "dead and useless" by his opponents after his crucifixion, the last emperor will also be referred to in this way until he is bestowed with the imperial title. However, just as Christ's glory grew after he appeared to the

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[29]   Jane Draycott, "Hair Loss as a Facial Disfigurement in Ancient Rome?", *Approaching Facial Difference: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Human Face,* ed. Patricia Skinner et al. (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 106-135; Myrto Hatzaki, *Beauty and Male Body in Byzantium* (London: Palgrave, 2009). Indeed, Synesius even composed a hymn titled *In Praise of Baldness*. See Synesios, *In Praise of Baldness*, ed. George H. Kendall (Vancouver: Pharmakon Press, 1985).

[30]   See Manuela Studer-Karlen, "The Emperor's Image, in Byzantium: Perceptions and Functions", *Meaning and Functions of the Ruler's Image in the Mediterranean World*, ed. Michele Bacci et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 134-170.

[31]   *Oracula*, 16: 41-50.

believers three days following his crucifixion, the last emperor will similarly be regarded with the same power once he assumes his role. At this point, the use of the verb ἀνίστημι to describe both Christ's resurrection and the last emperor's "rebirth after being anointed by God" is highly significant. Thus, the author continually employs contrasting expressions to establish connections between the typologies of the crucified Christ, the revealed Christ, and the last emperor. Even the shared use of this verb is a deliberate choice, highlighting the necessity of depicting the last emperor within a Christ-like typology.

Another of these heralding elements is the arrival of a time when people are in their greatest need of a savior figure. At this juncture, the author(s) depict the condition of the faithful in an exceptionally dramatic manner, thereby fully emphasizing the extent of this desperation:

> For in those times people will be distressed. beat their heads against the ground. sprinkle dust over their heads and cry aloud to the Lord. the God of Heaven and Earth. Then the Lord will hear their prayer and will turn his ears to those who inhabit the earth. He will send his archangel in human shape who will take up his abode on the islands and will find His holy man, the anointed whom nobody sees, and nobody knows. [32]

Following these heralding elements, it is essential to highlight the unique sanctification of space found in *Oracula*. This sanctification diverges from the narrative structures of other apocalyptic texts. When examining apocalyptic writings from the same period, composed in Hebrew, Syriac, and Armenian, Jerusalem emerges as the most prominent, and often the sole, sanctified location. However, in *Oracula*, the sanctified space is the imperial capital, Konstantinoupolis. The emphasis on Konstantinoupolis is very dominant in the text that there is no mention of the last emperor and Christ meeting in Jerusalem:

> The true emperor, who lives in a moist place because of the burning heat, whom people drove away from his residence and whom they lodged on the islands, where he is sailing and fishing in the seventh year – week, will be revealed at the end of the [dominion of the] Ishmaelites. He will succeed (them) in the days of the south-westerly wind and [then] the first will be second and the second first. And after that, places of execution [will be] prepared in the middle of the city, on the crowded Plakoton, on a Friday at the third hour of the day. […] He will be instructed by an angel who presents himself to the revealed one in human form like a eunuch wearing white, and who will speak into his ear while he is asleep. And taking his right hand, he will say: "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light for he appeals to you to tend his chosen people", and the second time he will say to him: "Come out, you who are hidden, hide no more, many people are looking for you, all of them will go out, you alone will go in". And the third time he will give him stone tables, in which two commandments have been carved: to

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32   *Oracula*, 16: 40-56.

punish the gentiles and make them righteous and to persecute impiety and bum to death those who are doing the things of Sodom. and, likewise, to drive away the wicked priests from tile temple and restore the worthy ones to holy [office], as it pleases the God of Heaven and Earth.[33]

He lives in Tetrapylon, towards the coldest part of the Sigma and at the southern seaside and in an obscure and muddy place. When he comes out of the Golden Gate and the Xylokerkos Gate, all things that are topsy-turvy come to an end and the defilements cease. His quarters lie in between the two outer [piers of the] gates. On the right there is a wide. paved road with polished square stones. The fourth column is snake-like and beast-like female charioteer stands before his tabernacle and holds a crown, loudly acclaiming the fortune of the chosen emperor. Before his tabernacle there is a shrine of the God-man where he brings offerings and shows his reverence. It has one frieze [on which] his name is carved: he brings the war, the devices of the blond [peoples] and the sheddings of blood in a cup toppled over on the ground, and on his back he has the lord of the beasts and on his chest the sign of the cross. On the left side of his quarters there is a narrow road, an alley flooded with water and deep. [The waters] are flooding and roaring and billowing towards the steep sea [side] of the city of seven hills and a raging river rush down the iron cliff. [34]

In the passage cited from *Oracula* above, a common feature of apocalyptic literature is evident: the creation of an "unbeliever" enemy that the last emperor will vanquish. In this work, the enemy is identified as the Ishmaelites, or in other words, Muslim Arabs. It is worth noting that the period during which apocalyptic works in Armenian, Greek, and Syriac proliferated coincides with the 8th-10th centuries when Muslim forces were at their strongest against Byzantium and the Christian communities of the Middle East. Consequently, in classical apocalyptic texts, Muslim Arabs are nearly universally depicted as the common enemy. This depiction can easily be explained by the victories of the Muslims during this period and the potential threats they posed to Byzantium. However, underlying this choice of enemy is also a sense of Byzantine irredentism. The Muslims' conquest of significant territories, including Jerusalem, from Byzantium in the second quarter of the 7th century naturally fueled this irredentism.[35] If the emperor is to lead all the faithful to righteousness and establish the sacred empire's dominion over the world, then, with the infinite power bestowed upon him by God, he can also reclaim the lands fallen into the hands of the "unbeliever" and restore them under the Byzantine realm. Thus, it is clear what kind of motivations this text provided for both the authors of the apocalyptic tradition and its audience. According to the details in the passage, the emperor

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33   *Oracula*, 16: 5-24.

34   *Oracula*, 16: 76-95.

35   Although irredentism or expansionism is a term typically associated with modern politics, it has been used by Byzantinists to describe Byzantine politics, particularly in the 9th and 12th centuries. See Paul Alexander, "Byzantium and the Migration of Literary Works and Motifs: The Legend of Last Roman Emperor", *Medievalia et Humanistica,* 2 (1971): 47-68; Dimitri Angelov, "Byzantine Ideological Reactions to the Latin Conquest of Constantinople", *The Fourth Crusade and its Consequences,* ed. Angeliki Laiou (Paris: Lethielleux, 2005), 293-310.

will suddenly bring an end to the rule of the Ishmaelites and execute their leaders in the center of the city at the Plakoton.

The location referred to as Plakoton, where the leaders of the Ishmaelites are to be executed, is the Column of Konstantinos on Mese Street, known today as the Çemberlitaş Column. This porphyry column, brought by Emperor Konstantinos I from the Temple of Apollo in Rome and crowned with a statue of the emperor holding his scepter, stands at the center of the Forum of Konstantinos.[36] Positioned at a highly significant point in the topography of Konstantinoupolis, this column has witnessed celebrations of various prophets, apostles, saints, and political victories.[37] Indeed, the structure, which retained its importance throughout the ages, held great symbolic value for the Macedonian dynasty to which Emperor Leo VI belonged, as well. As inferred from *De Ceremoniis*, this column bore several symbolic meanings that the dynasty attributed to various persons, places, or objects.[38] In addition to the Christian saint-centered celebrations previously held around the column, the dynasty also organized festivals for certain Old Testament prophets, aiming to establish a sense of divine unity. Moreover, through this column, the dynasty forged spiritual connections with the cult of Konstantinos and the sacred relics housed at its base, using these connections within the framework of Byzantine political theology. The association with the cult of Konstantinos I emphasized that the dynasty's right to rule, like Konstantinos', was divinely ordained, while the link with the sacred relics reinforced this divine mandate. Therefore, the choice of location in this passage is far from coincidental. Furthermore, the context of destroying the "Ishmaelites" and, more specifically, their leaders in the shadow of this column—given the lasting traumas they had inflicted on the empire's collective memory—provides a significant subtext that supports the aforementioned interpretations.

In addition to the Column of Konstantinos, other sanctified locations in the capital mentioned in the passage include the Tetrapylon, the Golden Gate, and the Xylokerkos Gate. The Sigma,[39] a colonnaded structure located near the Pege Gate, which is one of the city's fortifications, is only referenced for its role in pinpointing the location of the Tetrapylon. The Tetrapylon is described in T. Preger's *Scriptores Originum Constantinopolitanarum*. This structure, with its pyramidal roof, four corners, and bronze plating, features a statue of a winged wind goddess.[40] It is situated between the Forums of Konstantinos and Theodosius. Moreover, according to Preger's work, this structure was once a place where the funerals of certain emperors were met by their successors, who sometimes wept before the procession.[41] Based on Preger's account, it can be

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[36]   See Sarah Basset, "Column of Constantine and Its Statue", *The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople*, ed. Sarah Basset (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 192-204; Carey Wells, *The Column of Constantine at Constantinople: A Cultural History* (MA Thesis, New York: University of New York, The Graduate Center, 2017).

[37]   John Baldovin, *The Urban Character of Christian Worship, The Origins, Development and Meaning of Stational Liturgy* (Roma: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987), 197.

[38]   Konstantinos Porphyrogenitus, *De Ceremoniis*, ed. Ann Moffatt - Maxeme Tall (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 28-29.

[39]   Alexander van Milligen, *Byzantine Constantinople: The Walls of the City and Adjoining Historical Sites* (London: John Murray, 1899), 77-78; Raymond Janin, *Constantinople Byzantine* (Paris: Institut Français d'Etudes Byzantines, 1964), 424-425.

[40]   Theodorus Preger (ed.), *Scriptones Originum Constantinopolitanarum II* (Berlin: Teubner, 1901), 181.

[41]   Preger, *Scriptorum*, 181-182.

easily inferred that the inclusion of the Tetrapylon in the text is deliberate. Brokkaar interprets the symbolism associated with this location as follows:

The *Tale of the True Emperor,* too, seems to indicate that the last emperor is petrified for it states that he "lives inside the Tetrapylon, towards the coldest part of the Sigma and at the southern seaside" (lines 76-77), prior to the moment of his being discovered by the people and Ins being anointed by God above. [42]

The connection established by Brokkaar and his team is not a great mystery awaiting resolution for researchers navigating the allegorical world of the Byzantine Empire. As previously mentioned, until heralded by angels, the last emperor is a despised "dead" figure. Therefore, in *Oracula*, the mention of the future emperor residing in Tetrapylon, where imperial funerals were traditionally carried out, is an allusion to this "dead" character. However, what is even more significant is that the Tetrapylon symbolizes not only the death of an emperor but also the birth or, in other words, the beginning of the reign of his successor. This narrative thus serves to symbolize both the death and the birth of an emperor at the Tetrapylon.

The Golden Gate mentioned in the passage is the most magnificent ornament of the Theodosian Walls. This gate, through which emperors entered upon their victorious return to the capital, consists of marble blocks and various decorations with a high archway. [43] Such a significant gate certainly deserves a place in *Oracula*. The Xylokerkos Gate, which Brokkaar and his team insist is the same as the Golden Gate, is, according to some experts such as van Millingen, another gate of the Theodosian Walls.[44] However, the location of this gate does not align well with the narrative. From this, it is clear that *Oracula* presents the topography of Konstantinoupolis with quite complex data. Although there may be an interpolative possibility regarding this issue, the impression the author intends to create for the reader is very clear. Therefore, it can be said that the fundamental point of the narrative is that the character who will become the last emperor lived near symbolic and magnificent structures like the Golden Gate or Tetrapylon. Indeed, the issues of the female charioteer and the altars discussed later in the narrative, according to Brokkaar, are decorations found only at the Golden Gate. The author presents these decorations as if they were part of a real narrative.[45] The aim here is to depict the triumphal arch symbolism created at the Golden Gate through the narrative of the last emperor. Moreover, the text also contains a clear expression that many situations will improve with the emperor's exit through this gate.

After examining the imagery of Konstantinoupolis in *Oracula*, we must now consider the proclamation of the last emperor to the people and his resurrection from the dead. As seen in the passage below, the appearance of this character on earth is depicted through various forms of nature symbolism:

> *There is a fir tree which was planted at the moment of his birth. It has side-branches*
> *above its fir-tree [branches]. God will reveal him and will show him and will anoint*

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[42]   Brokkaar, *Oracle*, 28.

[43]   Janin, *Constantinople,* 264.

[44]   Millingen, *Constantinople*, 90-94.

[45]   Brokkaar, *Oracle*, 29.

him with oil at the end of time - and he is anointed from his belly [upward] with
holy oil. He will be revealed as follows: a star will appear for three days. and at night
for three hours, throughout the city as far as [the church of] the Mother of the
Highest. The star is not one of the planets, but it is as it appeared at the redemptive
birth of Christ. A herald will shout clearly in those three days. calling up and
revealing the hoped one and then the people when seeing and hearing the
thunderous voice of the message, will be astonished. And in their astonishment,
both in joy and in fear, they will cry that they do not know the hoped one. Then,
while looking up and. crying out the "Kyrie Eleison" fervently and assiduously. they
will all beat their foreheads against the ground, sprinkle dust over their heads, heave
sighs and shed tears for the grief that is coming over them. And then the deity will
relent and hear their prayer benevolently and he will look upon the inhabitants of
the earth with a merciful eye. Thanks to chosen who have remained by then, he will
be recognized as the chosen one. Underneath it a cross will be hanging and, to the
left of the purple cross. [there will be] a vast rainbow. As he agreed upon in the
everlasting covenant with our fathers. And as they are all unaware of [the
whereabouts of] the hoped for the rainbow will bend backwards down its spine,
which is set in a curve against the vault of heavenly.[46]

The fir tree imagery in this passage is not included by mere coincidence, just like other elements in the text. The fir tree is a plant that was venerated and considered sacred in the Old Testament and particularly within the early Christian cultural milieu. In the Book of Hosea, which is the first book of the Twelve Minor Prophets, there is a prophecy in which God speaks of the fir tree as a symbol for Israel.[47]

The passage above is interpreted as the words of God: The fir tree is ever green and in bloom. It has served as a form of shelter for people not only in spring but also during times when many other trees shed their leaves and offer no protection. This is why the fir tree metaphor in the Book of Hosea is chosen. More explicitly, the point being conveyed here is that God continually protects humanity, providing safety, comfort, and abundance under his protection.[48] Given that the middle and late Byzantine literature highly valued the Old Testament tradition and adhered closely to it, it is quite plausible that the association of the last emperor with the fir tree in *Oracula* is based on this metaphor. This possibility is further reinforced by the subsequent sentence in the passage, which notes the presence of white birds on the tree. The Book of Psalms in the Old Testament emphasizes that storks build their nests in fir trees.[49] The stork, in Hebrew (חֲסִידָה) is connected to the words for "piety" and "love", a concept frequently recognized by Greek writers as an allegory.[50] The depiction of white birds in *Oracula* may therefore be related to this stork imagery.

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[46]   *Oracula*, 16: 95-124.

[47]   Hosea 14:8 (accessed on 23.08. 2023).

[48]   Charles Ellicot, *Ellicot's Bible Commentary for English Reader* (Missouri: Gospel Publishing, 2018), 17.

[49]   "… There the birds make their nests." *Psalms* 104:17 (accessed on 23.08. 2023).

[50]   Henry Tristan, *Natural History of the Bible: Being a Review of the Physical Geography, Geology and Meteorology of the Holy Land California: A Thousand Field* (MA: Adamant Media, 2018), 248.

Considering both pieces of information together, it is evident that the fir tree metaphor could be derived from Old Testament sources.

In prophetic/apocalyptic literature, there is a deeply significant connection between prophecy and astronomy. The internalization of this connection has led to profound layers of richness within the history of literature. These connections, especially during the reign of Leo VI and throughout the Macedonian Dynasty, were met with unprecedented interest despite the church's strong opposition.[51] The passage above from *Oracula* also mentions a narrative linked to astronomy. The reader is informed about the presence of a star resembling the celestial body seen at the birth of the Messiah. According to prevalent views in Byzantine astronomy, stars do not indicate the causes of events but merely their signs.[52] This perspective sought to distinguish the art of reading stars from the practice of sorcery, which was prohibited by church canons. Indeed, the passage underscores this distinction by clarifying that the visible star is "not a planet". Subsequently, the star is equated with the one seen at the birth of Christ. From this, it can be inferred that the star's depiction in the text serves to confer messianic qualities upon the final emperor.

The images of the purple cross and rainbow depicted in the following passage are noteworthy for their symbolic meanings. The purple cross undoubtedly alludes to an imperial symbol. The sacredness of purple and its association with imperial authority have roots in Antiquity, and this notion was reinforced in Byzantium, particularly through the laws enacted during the reign of Theodosius II (408-450). According to these laws, the wearing of purple silks and other luxurious textiles was strictly reserved for members of the imperial family.[53] Thus, the purple cross in the text emerges as a symbol highlighting the divine legitimacy of the empire.

The image of the rainbow, on the other hand, is rooted in the Old Testament's Book of Genesis. The rainbow is regarded as a sign of God's covenant with Noah, symbolizing God's promise never to flood the earth again.[54] This symbol represents the idea that humanity must adhere to the covenant to attain what has been promised. It serves as a form of communication between one party of the agreement and the other.[55] Indeed, in previous passages from *Oracula*, the prayers of the Byzantine people to God for the last emperor are well known. On the other hand, in the narrative of apocalyptic texts, the arrival of the last emperor on earth appears as a divine promise. At this point, the image of the rainbow may serve as a sign of the promiser announcing the fulfillment of the promise in this section of the text. Ultimately, in *Oracula*, these images serve to emphasize both the portrayal of the Byzantine emperor as a sacred figure and the divine covenant with God. In this context, the purple cross and the rainbow can be understood as symbols of the last emperor's earthly and divine power.

[51]   Anne Caudano, "Astronomy and Astrology", *A Companion to Byzantine Science*, ed. Stavros Lazaris (Boston: Brill, 2019), 211-213.

[52]   Paul Magdalino, *L'Orthodoxie des Astrologues: Le science entre le dogme et la divination a Byzance* (Paris: Lethiellux, 2006), 114-132.

[53]   *Codex Theodosianus*, X, 21, 3., ed. Clyde Pharr (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 285.

[54]   *Genesis* 9:12-17; Henry, *Commentary*, 203; Shulamit Laderman, *Images of Cosmology in Jewish and Byzantine Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 191.

[55]   Shulamit Laderman, "The Rainbow: Envisioning Divine Communication in Jewish, Byzantine and Islamic Art", *Ars Judaica,* 14 (2018): 7-26.

From this point onward, *Oracula* focuses on the joy of the faithful and the fears of the unbelievers following the arrival of the last emperor, bringing the narrative to a close. While most Syriac-Byzantine apocalyptic texts offer brief information about the last emperor and then proceed to detailed accounts of his proclamation of salvation to Christians and his meeting with the Messiah in Jerusalem, *Oracula* deviates from this tradition. Instead, it provides a more elaborate portrayal of the character but omits references to the emperor's political-military actions and his encounter with the Messiah. The reason for this narrative uniqueness may be linked to the purpose of the text's composition. Rather than crafting a traditional apocalyptic work that warns Christians and offers them various prophecies, the author(s) may have aimed to produce a text that serves Byzantine political theology. If the portions of the text that have not undergone interpolation were indeed written during the reign of Leo VI, it is evident that the political theology of the era saw a proliferation of works emphasizing the sacredness of the throne and the emperor. This emphasis on imperial cult and throne sanctity can be traced to the efforts of the Macedonian Dynasty, which sought to reinforce these ideals, especially considering that it had seized power through violent means just two decades prior to Leo VI's accession.

Ultimately, *Oracula* occupies a distinct position within apocalyptic literature, largely due to its portrayal of the last emperor. Unlike other texts in this genre, which emphasize the Day of Judgment, *Oracula* shifts focus to the governance of an idealized political entity, and instead of highlighting the messianic figure, it emphasizes an idealized emperor. This suggests that the text, while containing eschatological elements, is crafted to serve the Byzantine political-theological framework.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the last emperor myth as presented in *Oracula*, a prophetic text attributed to Byzantine Emperor Leo VI. The analysis focuses on the detailed depiction of the Last emperor's genealogy, physical characteristics, and his prophesied descent to Earth and explores the relationship between the construction of this character and Byzantine political theology. In *Oracula*, the last emperor is portrayed as an idealized leader who harmonizes Christian and traditional Byzantine symbols. This figure is described as a savior who will restore order and achieve victory over the forces of evil in an apocalyptic scenario. By integrating both messianic and imperial archetypes, the text creates a character that serves the ideological and religious objectives of Byzantium. The creation of this character serves to reinforce Byzantine political theology, especially during periods of crisis. The divine genealogy and preordained role of the emperor emphasize the sacred and universal mission of the Byzantine state. Thus, *Oracula* functions not only as a prophetic text but also as a tool to consolidate Byzantine religious and political authority. The mythological depiction of the last emperor plays a crucial role in legitimizing and strengthening imperial power, aligning it with theological and political legitimacy.

Regardless of the period in which the text was written, *Oracula* presents two significant typologies through the topos of the last emperor: the first is the messianic typology it draws upon, while the second is the ideal imperial cult for which it serves as a source. In the first typology, as

we examine the traits attributed to the last emperor, we encounter a pronounced *imitatio Christi.* Many of the characteristics traditionally associated with the descent of Christ in apocalyptic literature have been repurposed in *Oracula* to describe the last emperor, thus encouraging the reader to perceive this figure in a Christ-like framework. If this is a deliberate narrative choice, it likely reflects the effort to sanctify the Byzantine throne, as previously discussed. The second typology, on the other hand, relates to the process the last emperor initiates. As an apocalyptic text, *Oracula* is less concerned with the Day of Judgment and more focused on presenting an ideal Christian empire. For this reason, the author(s) likely used the last emperor to express the qualities they deemed essential for the ruler of this idealized political structure. In doing so, the text functions as a *speculum principum* (mirror for princes), offering a model for imperial governance. This second typology plays a crucial role in reinforcing the imperial cult in Byzantium. It contributes to the cumulative characterization of the emperor, becoming a vital component of this cultural and religious construct.

In conclusion, the findings of this study illustrate that the last emperor myth in *Oracula* reflects the religious and political sensitivities of Byzantine society and serves as a strategic element in reestablishing power and authority during times of crisis. The character's depicted attributes and role extend beyond mere eschatological symbolism to function as an archetype that reinforces the ideological foundations of Byzantine governance.

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